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# Contaminant found beneath El Toro base

**ENVIRONMENT:** Officials say the chemical is contained, but a panel wonders about other unknowns.

By PAT BRENNAN  
The Orange County Register

A new toxic contaminant has been found in shallow ground water at the El Toro Marine base, the residue of decades of explosions at a training site.

The discovery of the chemical, called perchlorate, has raised anxiety on a citizens base-cleanup panel about what other, as yet unknown chemicals might be found after the base closes in July, and whether they could disrupt future development plans.

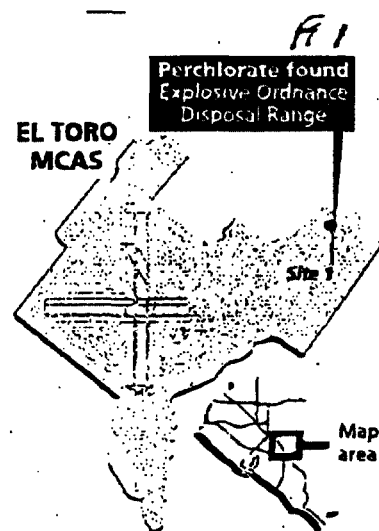
"Whole projects can be killed by things like this," said Greg Hurley, an environmental attorney and chairman of the panel.

The chemical was found in shallow ground water beneath the base's 22-acre explosives

range. It is the second contaminated site not widely known to the public to be revealed this year. The other, a decade-old, 11,600-gallon jet-fuel spill, has been almost entirely cleaned up.

Civilian employees in charge of base cleanup said Wednesday that they tested about 77 wells around the base for perchlorate in October, and only one showed high levels — 280 parts per billion, above the state's threshold of 18 parts per billion. That tentative result was confirmed later by state and federal officials.

Testing of other wells downhill from the site showed no evidence of the chemical, suggesting that it is not spreading, said Joseph Joyce, environmental coordinator at the Base Realignment and



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Closure Office. The wells monitor shallow ground water at the base that is not used for drinking.

The chemical seems to be confined to a small area and seems unlikely to migrate elsewhere.

Hurley, chairman of the base Restoration Advisory Board, said he wonders whether private developers will suffer severe financial setbacks if they discover more previously unknown waste after the Marines are gone.

But base officials say the military will still be responsible for cleaning up any leftover waste after the base closes.